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# Postcard Holiday Greetings

William J. Petersen

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# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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## Postcard Holiday Greetings

Stored away in many an Iowa attic, or an equally out-of-the-way nook, one may find dusty family albums containing picture postcards of almost every variety and on almost any subject. There are postcards of Iowa, and of the more than one thousand cities and towns located in the Hawkeye State. There are postcards of Main Street, the city parks, the town hall and the town square, the public library, the schools and churches—the hospitals, depots, fire stations. There are postcards of county court houses and county fair grounds. There are postcards of various events—of Decoration Day parades, of Fourth of July celebrations, of circus parades and noisy carnivals, and of long-forgotten but always remembered Chautauquas.

There are postcards recording the visits of presidents and other dignitaries to a community. There are postcards dealing with community pride, such as booster advertising showing huge potatoes or pumpkins so large they fill an entire



wagon. There are postcards boasting another famous Iowa crop—its pretty girls that can be found in abundance. There are postcards recording catastrophes—fires, floods, tornadoes. Finally, there are postcards of the “I Wish You Were Here” type with the name of the town printed in large letters—Lone Tree, Lost Nation, What Cheer, or Deep River. The list is almost endless!

Most numerous of all the picture postcards that have been given to the State Historical Society over the years are those dealing with the nine legal holidays—Christmas, New Year, Washington’s Birthday, Lincoln’s Birthday, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Armistice Day, and Thanksgiving. Of these, Labor Day and Armistice Day have been rarely honored with picture postcards. Four other days, however, have been popular with postcard makers—Valentine’s Day, St. Patrick’s Day, Easter, and Halloween.

Of all these holidays, legal and special, the Christmas Greeting postcards have been the most popular and widely disseminated. The New Year Greeting (with Leap Year coming in every four years) was perhaps the next most popular. Each of the four special days (and particularly Valentine’s Day and Easter) was popular with Iowans and well represented in the Society’s picture postcard collection. The bulk of these holiday greetings are in color and cover the period from 1900 to 1914.



The outbreak of World War I brought an abrupt end to the beautiful colored lithograph postcards known to a generation of Iowans. True, postcards, both black and colored, continued to be sent out, but many of their producers had not mastered the fine art that had been developed in Germany and England. As a result, when colored covers were first introduced in *The Palimpsest* in April of 1960, the editor had to rely on either Currier and Ives lithographs or on modern color transparencies.

The first colored postcards used by the Society were three German lithographs that graced the back cover of the October 1962 issue of *The Palimpsest* and dealt with the Spirit Lake Massacre. From that date on the colored postcards of yesteryear have appeared with increasing frequency in *The Palimpsest*. Indeed, half of *The Palimpsest* numbers issued in the past year were illustrated with old lithograph postcards "Printed in Germany" that were made possible by the salesmen-artists who combed the State searching for interesting places to photograph in various Iowa communities before World War I.

Heretofore, we have emphasized the postcards printed in Germany. These were the dominant ones, particularly when depicting the Iowa scene. There were others, however, who became prominent in the postcard era. In England, Raphael Tuck gained a great reputation with his colorful



work. A goodly number of cards in the Society's collection were "Printed in Saxony," while still others bore lesser known imprints. The highly colored postcards available to the present generation are printed by letterpress or lithography. They do not match the old German lithographs because they are virtually impossible to reproduce without showing a pattern which cannot be overcome in our photographic offset process. Only once was this accomplished, in the March 1965 issue of *The Palimpsest* dealing with Upper Iowa College. It required special equipment to do this.

In preparing this issue of *The Palimpsest* for publication, we hope to give our readers some idea of the historical background of the holiday Christmas greeting, how it crossed the Atlantic to the United States, how it gained widespread popularity through the colored postcard greeting, and the magnitude of these postal messengers in the opening years of the 20th Century.

The earliest known holiday greeting card is a crude woodcut printed about 1450 A.D. in the Rhine Valley. This was actually a New Year's card, showing the Christ Child standing in the bow of an ancient galley manned by angels with the Virgin Mary seated by the mast. The inscription reads: "Here I come from Alexandria and bring many good years to give generously. I will give them for almost no money and have only God's love for my reward."





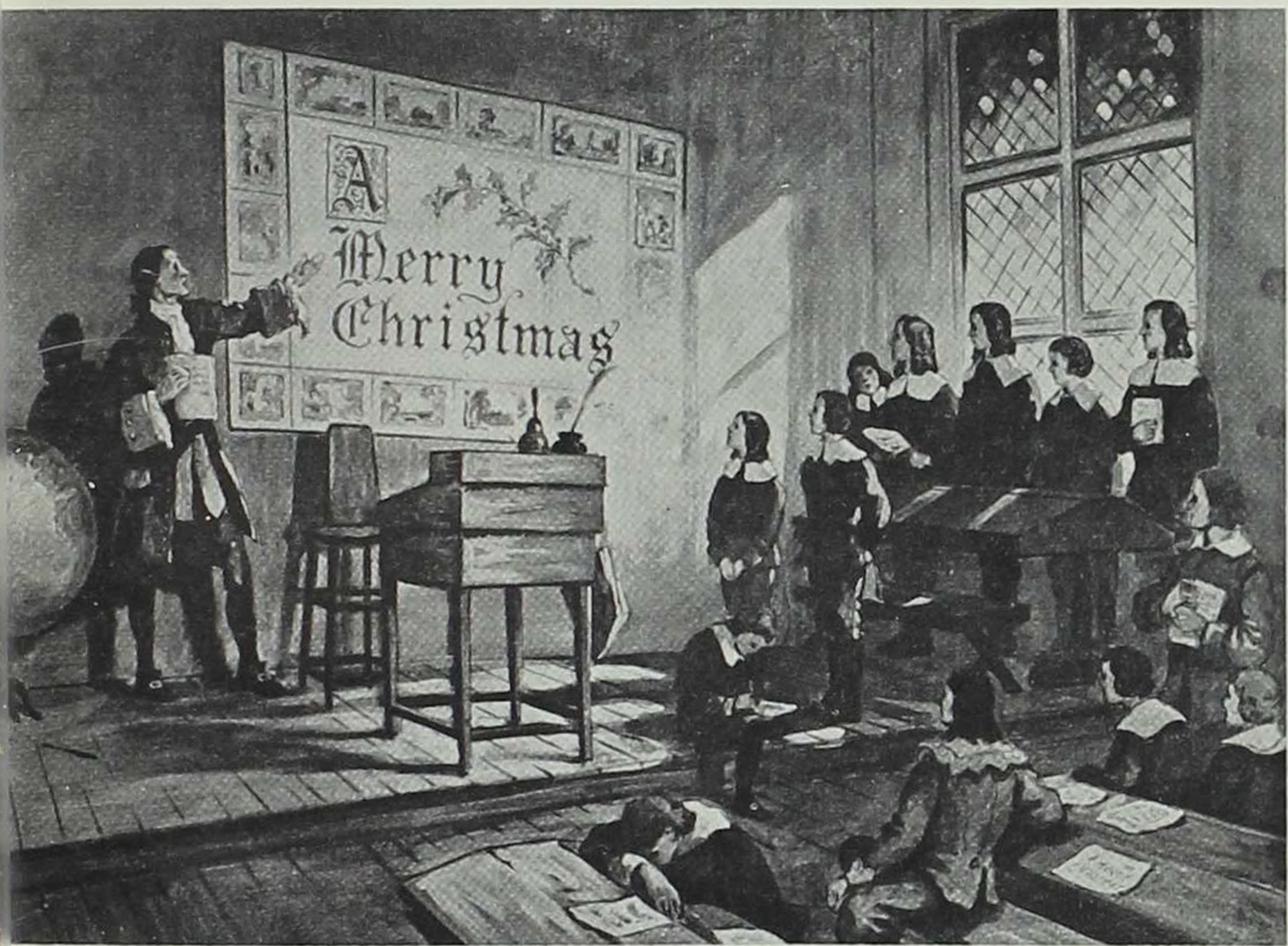
Von alexandria bin ich her gefarn  
 Und bringe vil güter so die wil ich mi  
 sparn Ich wil sie gebe umb klenes gelt  
 Ich bin got liephä ich da mit wol vgest



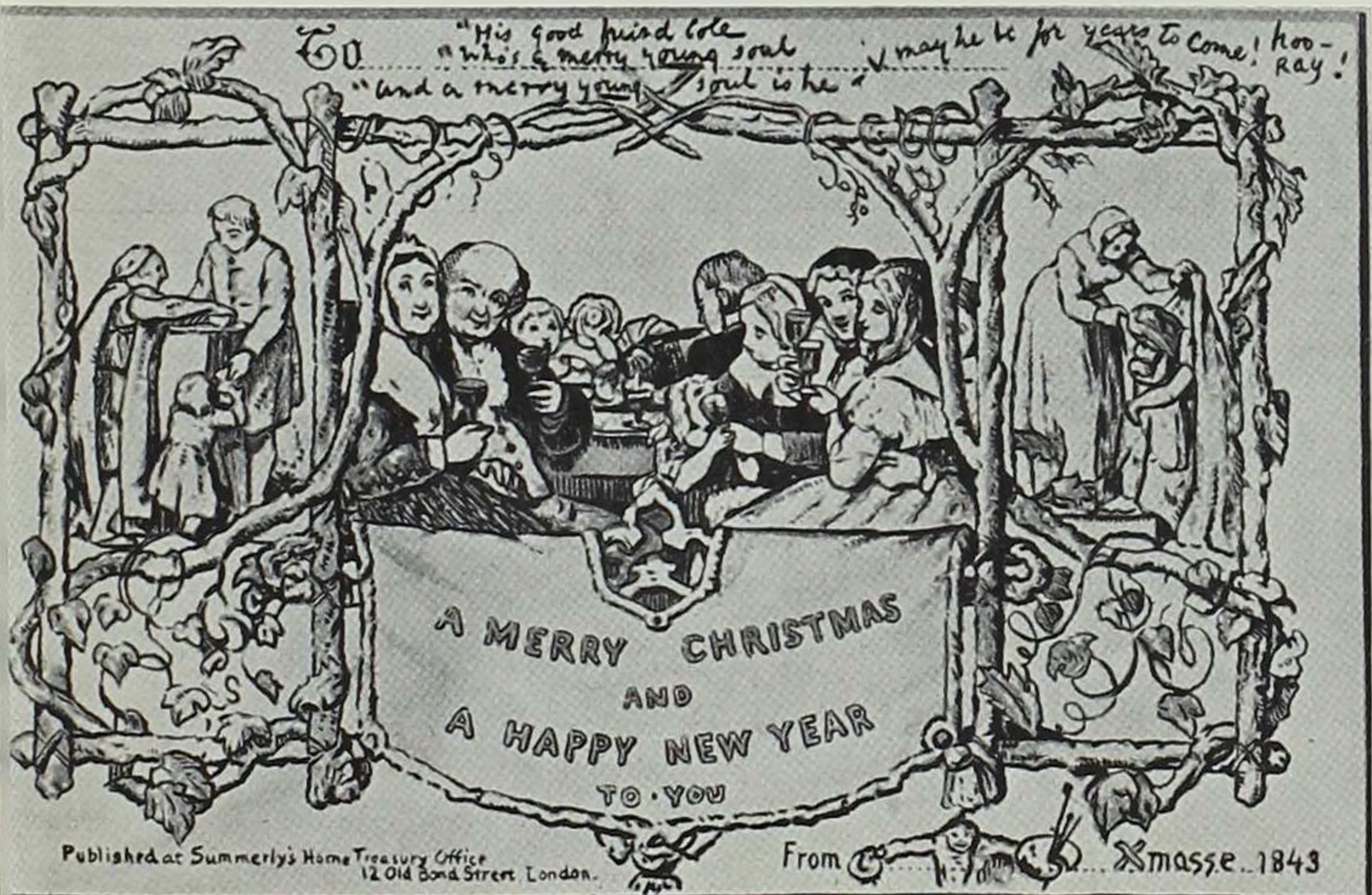
The ancestor of our modern Christmas card seems to have been the "Christmas Piece" which began to appear in England almost three centuries ago. The picture shows English schoolboys composing Yuletide greetings of good will, decorating them with scroll work and elaborate flourishes to display penmanship. The "Christmas Piece" was inscribed on special paper supplied by the schoolmaster and bordered with engraved pictures dramatizing the most important events of the year.

The world's first known Christmas card appears to have been designed by John Calcott Horsley in 1843, just three years before Iowa achieved statehood. A distinguished member of the Royal Academy, Horsley was a painter and illustrator for Sir Henry Cole, the inaugurator and first director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England. In 1846, one thousand copies were lithographed, hand colored, and sold by Felix Summerly's Treasure House in Bond Street, an art shop which Cole had set up in order to improve the taste of his contemporaries. This first Christmas card combined the wishes of a Merry Christmas with those of a Happy New Year, and thus attached it to the much older traditional New Year's Greeting. The conviviality depicted by the raised glasses in the central illustration was offset in part by the side panels which depicted "clothing the poor" and "feeding the hungry," as admonished by Christ. It bore contemporary signif-





English schoolboys learning how to prepare Christmas greetings.



The first historic Christmas card - 1843.



icance because this was the period of the Irish potato famine. Hunger and suffering were not unknown in the British Isles at this time.

That there was need for some sort of universal Christmas greeting was emphasized by Charles Dickens who wrote his *Christmas Carol* in 1843. Dickens had been living beyond his means and hoped to retrieve his fortune in this period of "intolerable anxiety and disappointment" with a short story appropriate for the Yuletide season. He followed his *Christmas Carol*, which did not bring him the profit he had hoped, with another Christmas story, *The Chimes*, in 1845. Thus, although Scrooge himself might have objected to the wasting of a halfpence on a Christmas card, the custom of sending them became well-established throughout the British Empire in the 1860's.

It was not long before the idea of sending a Christmas card took root in America. Credit for this custom has been given to Louis Prang, a penniless German immigrant, who came to the United States in 1850. Prang worked as a wood engraver, saved \$250, and opened up his own lithographic shop. In 1875, Prang issued the first line of Christmas cards ever published in the United States. His cards gained instant and widespread popularity. By the 1880's he had established his own publishing plant in Roxbury, a suburb of Boston. Here, on forty presses representing the most advanced lithographic process of the period,









THE MADONNA SIXTINA.

Raphael, Sixtine, Rome.

*A Happy Christmas*

















Hearty Greetings  
for Christmas















New Year Greetings.



A  
GLAD  
NEW YEAR



WISHING YOU  
A HAPPY  
NEW YEAR







©

A HAPPY  
NEW YEAR.



Francis Brundage



A  
Happy  
New Year



Lyons Studio

I hope You'll like Me - caus, now I'm  
here, I'll do my best for  
A HAPPY NEW YEAR









Love's Greeting.



To my Valentine.





To my  
Valentine.



VALENTINE SPECIAL

Though Cupid has so very much to do,  
It's with my heart I'm sending him to you.



"Here's to one and only one  
And may that one be He  
Who loves but one and only one  
And may that one be Me."











*"The Wearing of the Green"*









St. Patrick's Day



The Top o' the Mornin' to Ye!



"Kathleen  
at the Spring"



Fair as the Lily white  
Is my Irish Sweetheart  
St. Patrick's Day is a delight  
O Erin may we never part

St. Patrick's Day



It's Niver too High  
for the loikes of Us.





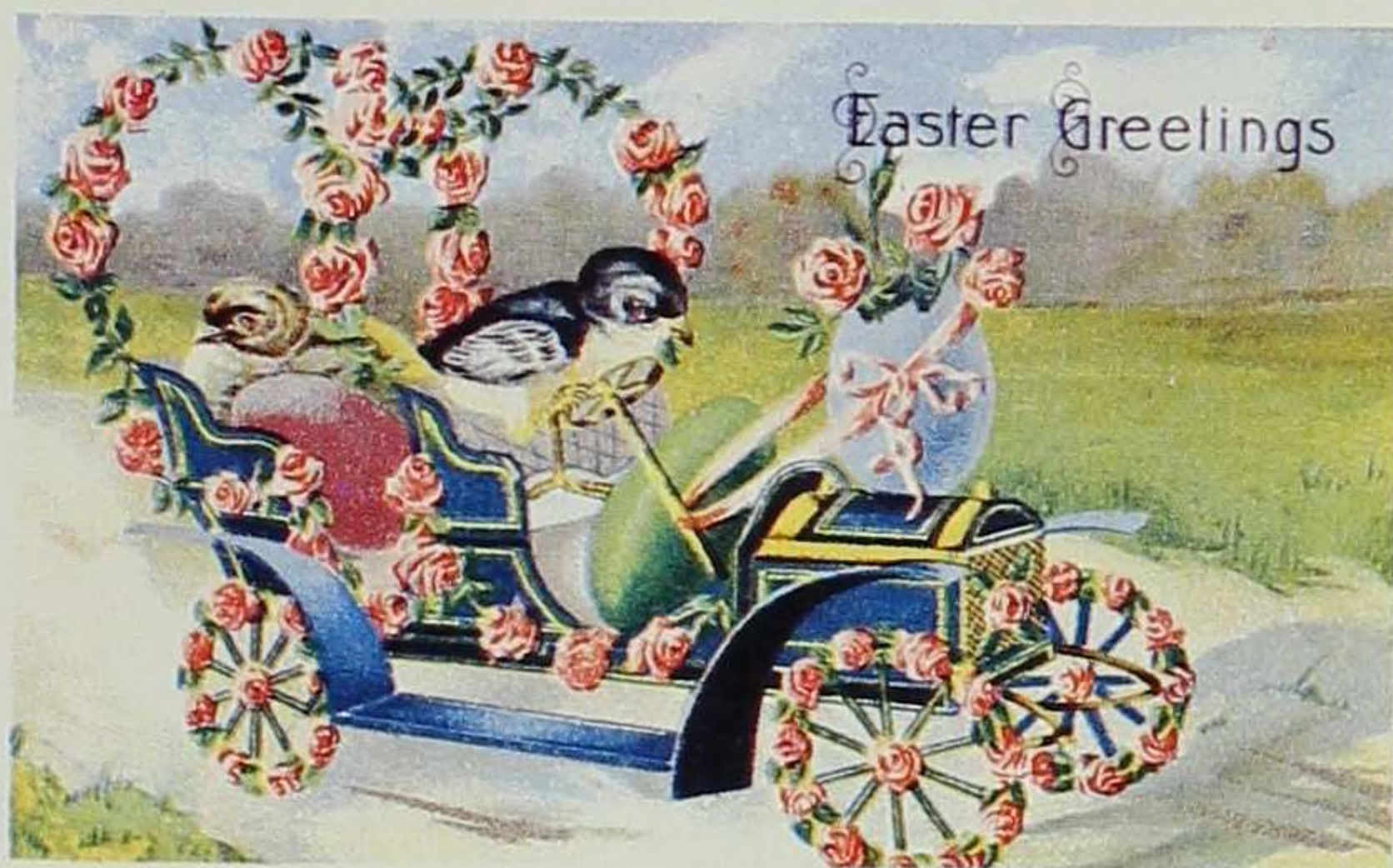
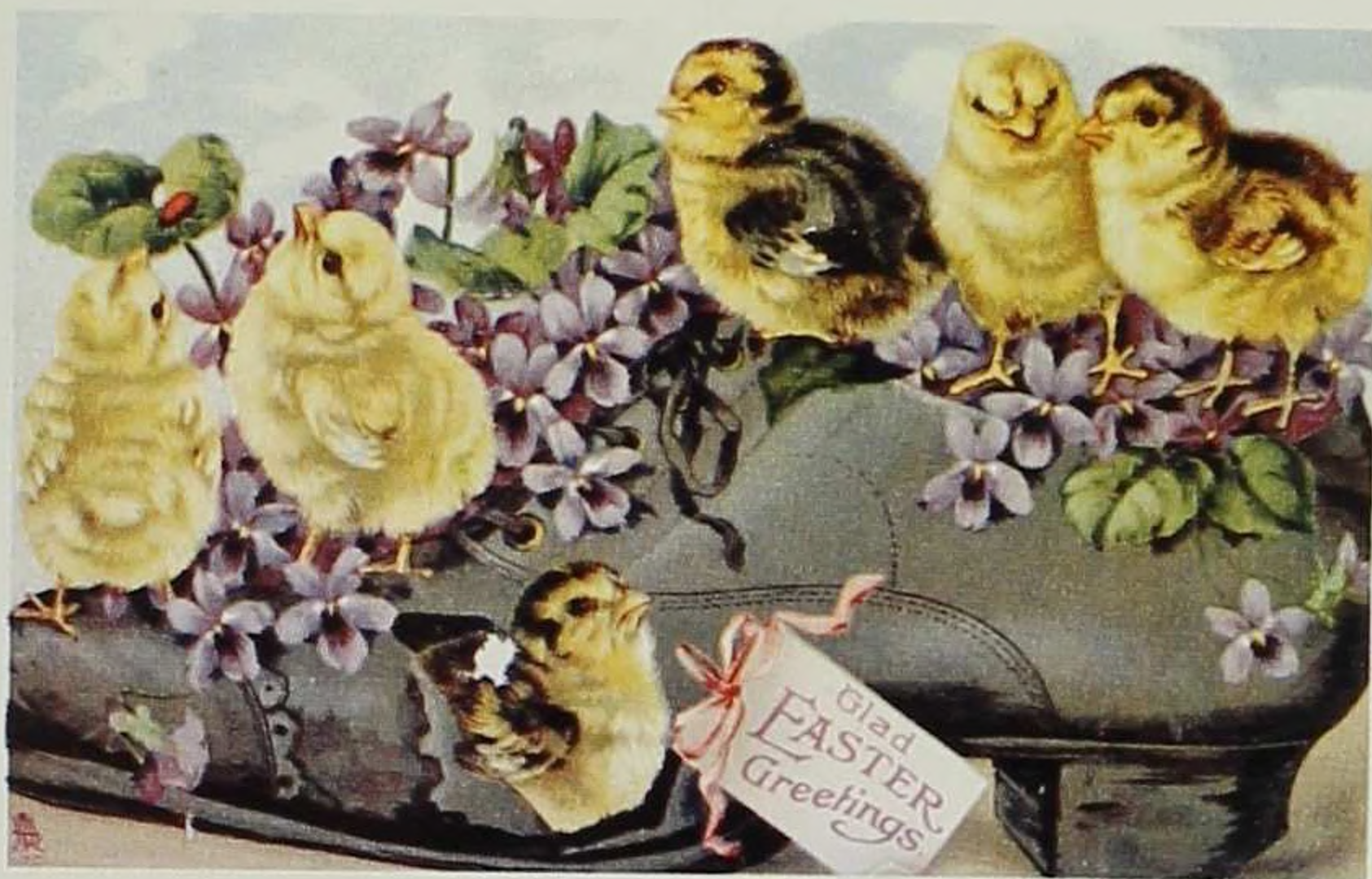
















WASHINGTON AT VALLEY FORGE.

Three Cheers for George Washington!



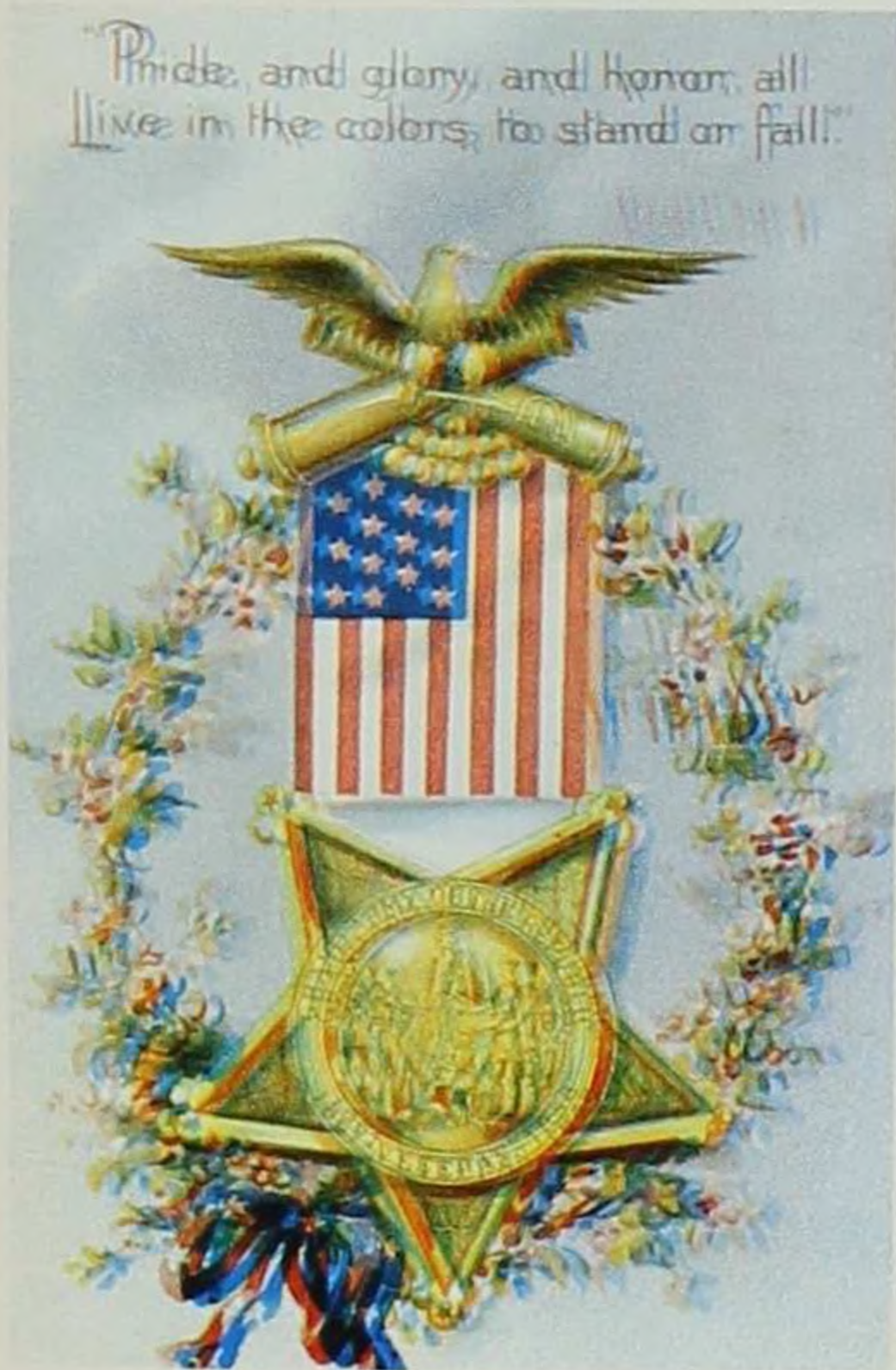
"Father, I cannot tell a lie, I did it with my Little Hatchet."



GEORGE WASHINGTON  
IN PRIVATE LIFE.















That's my flag - and  
I dare anybody to say  
anything against it -







## The Star Spangled BANNER

Oh! say, can you see by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hail'd at the  
twilight's last gleaming, Whom our stripes and bright  
stars, through the perilous fight, O'er the  
ram - parts we watch'd, were so gall - lantly  
premier'd? And the rock - et's - red - glare, the lone

Copyrighted by G. & C. M. Co., 1890



## MARYLAND & my MARYLAND

There will not ever be the same  
Ma - ry - land - my Ma - ry - land!  
Thy heart - ing sword shall never be  
Ma - ry - land! my Ma - ry - land!  
Re - veng' for Car - roll's sa - cred tomb, Re -  
veng' for How - ard's war - like shrone,

Copyrighted by G. & C. M. Co., 1890



## Marching through GEORGIA

Bring the good old ba - gle, boys, well  
sing an - oth - er song--  
Sing it with a spir - it that will  
start the world a - long--  
Sing it as we used to sing it,  
fif - ty thou - sand strong,

Copyrighted by G. & C. M. Co., 1890



## DIXIE LAND

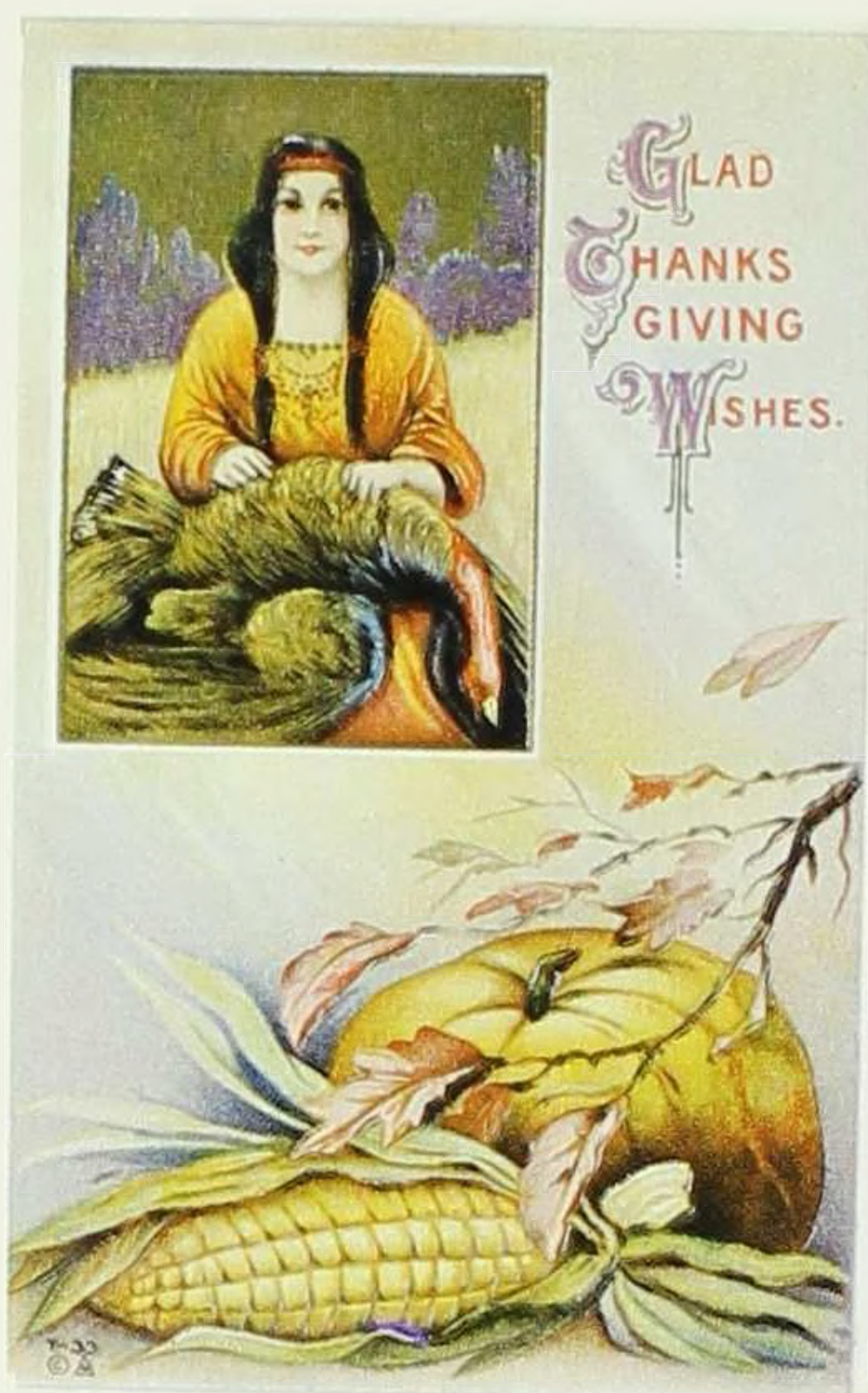
Land, oh, where the Old Times live  
not far from here, Look a way, Look a  
way, Look a way Dix - ie Land, in  
Dix - ie Land, what I was born in  
Far - ly on the track - y morn - ing, Look a

Copyrighted by G. & C. M. Co., 1890





















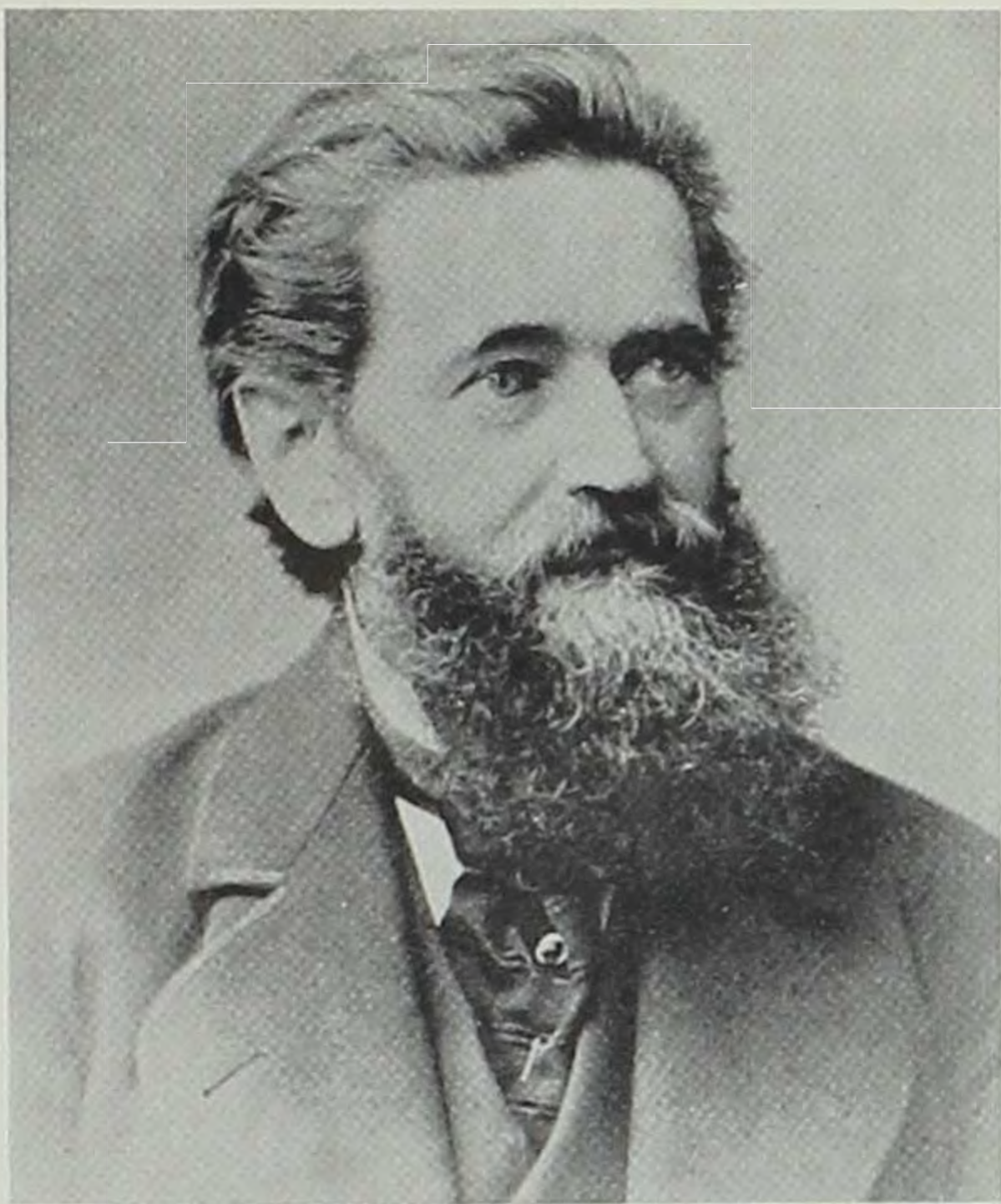
When witches abound  
And Ghosts are seen,  
Your fate you will learn  
On Hallowe'en.



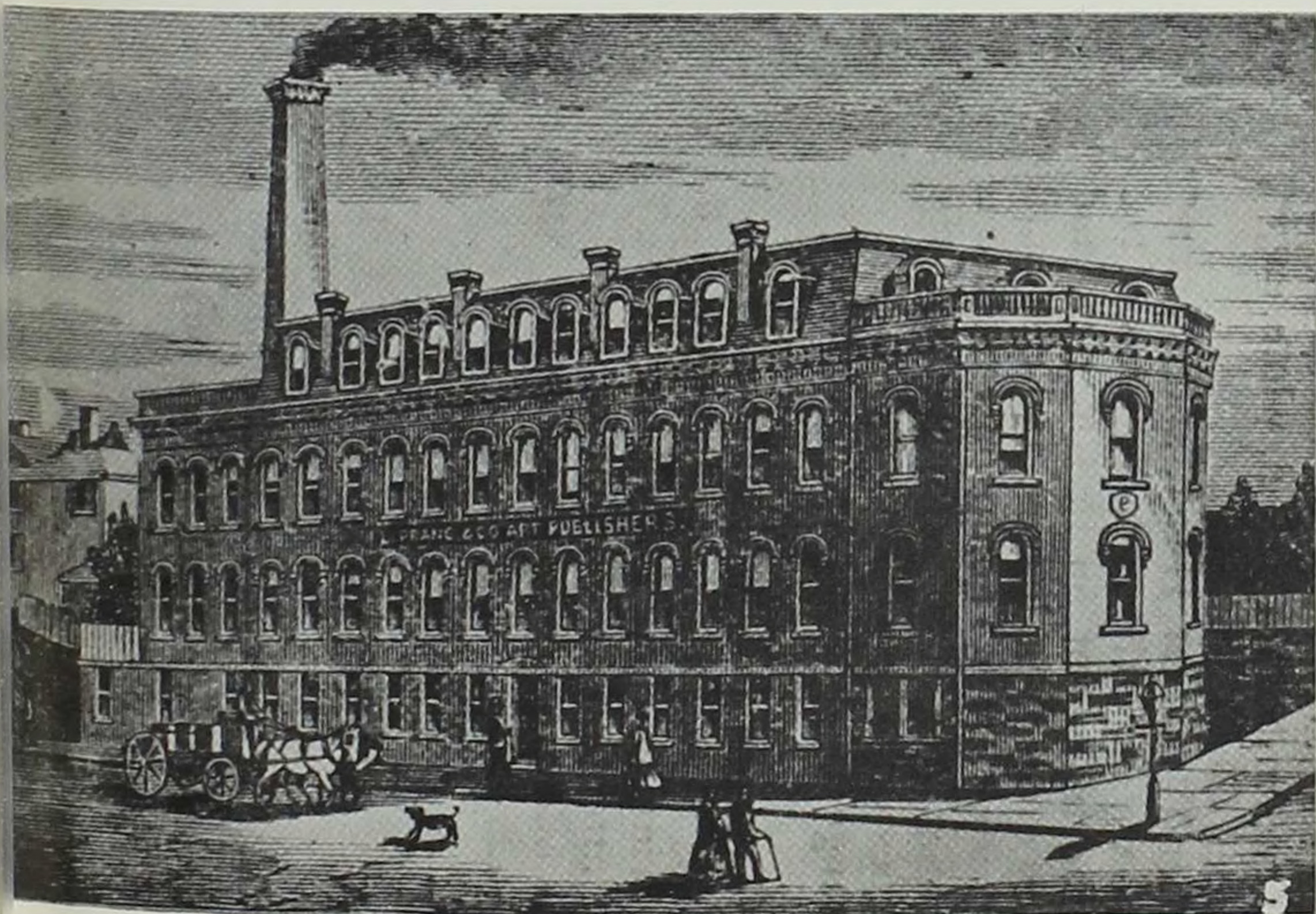








LOUIS PRANG  
(1824-1909)



The Prang Art Publishing Company in Roxbury.



Prang turned out 5,000,000 cards a year and employed 300 people! The building contained a lofty art gallery for displaying Prang's finished prints. Some of the loveliest and most famous "chromos" that decorated Iowans' walls in the Victorian period were printed by Prang in his Roxbury plant. He turned out other greetings in addition to Christmas cards. The manufacture of these early cards was exciting to watch and delighted many Bostonians. "To my mind," wrote Edward Everett Hale in 1889, "the most interesting place in Boston is Prang's printing house. Whenever I have a very grand friend visiting me, I always take him there to see Christmas cards made." And well might they thrill Mr. Hale, for Prang offered prizes totaling as much as \$3,000 to artists who submitted their sketches for exhibitions in New York.

The significance of Louis Prang to the American Christmas card has been described by Stephen Shannon, Executive Director of the National Association of Greeting Card Publishers. According to Shannon:

His initial creations featured Killarney roses, birds, sprays of apple blossoms, daisies and other illustrations having little to do with the Christmas scene. However, by 1881, Prang was producing over five million Christmas cards each year and his Yuletide greetings began to carry snow scenes, fir trees, glowing fireplaces and children playing with toys as shown by this typical Prang card of the elegant 80's. Prang's cards are prized by collectors





An ornate Louis Prang Christmas card.



because of their appealing designs and painstaking craftsmanship. Some were lithographed in as many as 17 different colors to achieve delicate lifelike gradations of tone. They retailed from 25c to as much as \$3.00 each. The more elaborate ones were trimmed with luxurious, colorful silk fringes as shown in the illustration.

Thus far we have discussed the Yuletide Greetings as they were prepared and mailed in envelopes. These cards should not be confused with the postcard greeting which evolved in the mid-1890's when people began to inscribe greeting sentiments and good wishes by hand on view cards they sent out at holiday seasons. Publishers were quick to notice this and they began to print such sentiments on their view cards, either as an overprint or as part of the design. Franz Huld of New York commenced publishing distinctive Christmas and New Year designs about 1900 but it was several years before they were produced in large quantities and widely used. Their popularity during a decade of time is attested by the predominance of these postcards in the Society's collection.

Since the postcards contained in this number of *The Palimpsest* are largely the product of the 20th Century, they will bring back nostalgic memories to many Iowans. Almost invariably these cards were sent in Iowa or received by Iowans from friends who lived in other states. Some members of our Society were clearly popular with members of the opposite sex. Thus, one man not only re-



ceived cards from various admirers on Valentine's Day but he also was favored with cards on St. Patrick's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Halloween. Such popularity must have been deserved. It enriched the Society's holdings when the entire collection came into its possession.

Several artists gained widespread recognition because of the high quality of their art. The names of Ellen H. Clapsaddle and Frances Isabelle Brundage come to mind as particularly outstanding. Both excelled in portraying little girls and boys, and their Christmas, Valentine, St. Patrick's Day and other greetings delighted many Iowans. The two little Irish lassies on the front cover of the February 1964 issue of *The Palimpsest* are typical of their craftsmanship. The one is signed by Ellen H. Clapsaddle; the other, although not identified, may possibly be a Brundage drawing.

It required a legion of artists to create all the greeting cards that were printed in the United States. Many of these artists remain anonymous to this day, being known only to the firms who employed them. All were highly productive; it has been estimated that Frances Brundage alone painted nearly two hundred designs in a single artist season at picturesque Cape Ann, Massachusetts. She was identified for years with the Raphael Tuck Company in England as an illustrator of children's books. When the picture postcard era blossomed out Brundage was well-prepared to



contribute to this interesting and profitable field.

It remained for one firm, the Detroit Publishing Company, to finally overtake and out distance all foreign competitors. In its peak years the Detroit firm produced and distributed millions of beautifully colored view cards. In its heyday, it employed and trained an army of itinerant photographers whose simple, yet careful work, remains today on a par with the best "straight" view photography this country has ever produced. The company was finally forced out of business in 1924 with the advent of cheap machine lithography. The value of its work is attested by the fact that many of the original Detroit negatives were purchased by Henry Ford's Edison Institute.

The number of postcard collectors today is tremendous, being numbered in the tens and possibly hundreds of thousands. One collector is said to have over a million cards—another 800,000. Most dedicated collectors tend to specialize in one or two categories, just as the stamp and coin collectors specialize. Some try for only the rarest, the most historic, the most unusual, or for the postcards illustrative of a certain period. No small number concentrate on greetings, and within this category are those who collect only Christmas Greetings. All find the hobby interesting, relaxing, and educational. Fortunately, most of them find it a relatively inexpensive hobby not to be compared with stamps or coins. Many gain genu-



ine satisfaction from the eternal quest they pursue of preserving history.

Some idea of the diversity as well as the going price for postcards may be gleaned from the advertisements which appear each month in *Hobbies* magazine. Here one will find quantities of postcards offered for sale for a cent or two a card. They will also be advertised for sale in different categories—Christmas, Detroit, European, Religious, Comic, etc. Offers also appear to buy certain types by the specialist. A whole field is open for the beginner. An attendance at one of the annual bourses (at which postcards are exhibited, exchanged, bought and sold) and held by such enthusiasts as the Windy City Post Card group in Chicago, would prove an eye-opener to the uninitiated.

The following "Credo" was gleaned from *Hobbies* magazine.

#### GOOD POST CARD RESOLUTIONS

1. I will have more respect for my collection of cards—I will keep them clean and undamaged, in a dry bug-proof place, and will examine them occasionally.
2. I will strive to be more of a connoisseur and less of a pack rat in my collecting.
3. I will remember that it is better to give than to receive, and will cut down on my "hoss-trading" tendencies when exchanging.



4. I will use my cards and share the pleasure of them with others more.
5. I will file and arrange my cards in a way convenient for my using them.
6. I will think about planning a future home for my cards, and not leave them to the mercy of an unappreciative, or untutored person.

Of particular concern to the historian is the work of that little known band of German photographers who visited hundreds of Iowa communities and left posterity a rich pictorial legacy. Their arrival in a community was rarely announced but issues of *The Palimpsest* featuring Davenport, Dubuque, Bedford, Shenandoah, and Emmetsburg are illustrative of the fact that nothing apparently escaped their eagle eyes. The historical record of the Hawkeye State would be poor indeed were it not for these gifted German artists. Their pictorial contribution, like the various holiday postcards reproduced herein, enliven and enrich the Iowa scene.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN